

## Wahkiakum County

### Protecting Infrastructure and Quality of Life:

#### Puget Island Sand Pit:

For years, the Wahkiakum County sand pit has been used for fill material to protect roads, homes and neighborhoods from chronic flooding and severe weather. Unfortunately, for a period of time the pit was not replenished with sand. Fearing they might soon face a situation where more sand was needed, the Wahkiakum County Commissioners requested assistance from Congressman Baird to obtain replenishment material from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Congressman Baird worked with the Columbia River Channel Coalition to find equipment capable of placing sand in the Wahkiakum County sand pit and the sand pit was successfully replenished.

#### Puget Island Erosion:

To find a long term solution to the erosion problems that persist on Puget Island, Congressman Baird brought Wahkiakum County and the relevant permitting agencies together for several meetings. As a result of these meetings, the County is working to design a bank stabilization plan, the residents of Puget Island are forming flood and erosion control districts, and the County is working to obtain permits and secure funding for the implementation of the bank stabilization plan. Congressman Baird will continue to support efforts to stabilize the shoreline of Puget Island by encouraging the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide dredge material at the appropriate time.

Additionally, Baird has also been helping individual homeowners obtain permits to complete temporary stabilization measures until the long term strategy is implemented. In 2004, Congressman Baird helped place sand bags on the beach in front of one of the threatened homes. Later that year, following conversations between the Congressman and Corps, dredge material from a nearby channel maintenance project were placed on the bank to help reduce erosion.

#### Grays River Flood Control Project:

Flooding resulting from upriver forestry and especially heavy rains washed out a dike along the upper Grays River destroying a great deal of chum salmon spawning habitat. The sediment and gravel washed down river and created large gravel bars in the Grays River, forcing the river to shift its course and erode farm pasture land. The erosion also threatened the Western Wahkiakum Water System and State Route 4. In response to this threat, Congressman Baird secured authorization

for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin studying a solution to chronic flooding in the Grays River valley. In addition, Congressman Baird brought the permitting agencies together to discuss appropriate measures for flood and erosion control. As a result, the Grays River Habitat Enhancement District was able to excavate a very large gravel bar from the Grays River. This project helped secure the water system and stop the erosion that had threatened the highway and farmland.

#### Western Wahkiakum Water System:

In order to expand the water system capability in Western Wahkiakum County, Congressman Baird secured an earmarked grant through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) State and Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG) program. The improvements will provide potable water to additional residents in Western Wahkiakum County.

When the EPA and the Wahkiakum Public Utility District (PUD) were unable to resolve differences of opinion over the amount of matching funding required by the PUD, Congressman Baird and Senators Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray intervened and were able to resolve the situation in the PUD's favor. As a result, the PUD was able to begin construction of the project.

#### Puget Island Water System:

Puget Island's 60 year old water system contains 17,000 feet of asbestos water lines. Without replacement pipes, decay will allow asbestos residue to flow through the system along with drinking water, posing a significant health risk to the community. In order to prevent this, Congressman Baird secured \$225,000 in an earmarked grant to upgrade the Puget Island Water System. When the system upgrade is completed, it will ensure that the residents of Puget Island receive clean drinking water.

#### Making Government more Effective and Efficient:

##### Streamlining the environmental permitting process:

Protecting the environment is always a priority, but regulatory processing and permitting have become unnecessarily costly and time consuming. In recent years, Congressman Baird has organized a series of meetings throughout Southwest Washington to bring local business leaders, farmers, builders, ports and others together with federal, state and local officials to improve the permitting process. As a direct result, several federal and state agencies have made significant progress in streamlining permits, reducing application backlogs and complexity, and improving coordination to expedite the process. There

is still work to be done, and much room for improvement, but Congressman Baird will continue to work with the consumers of permits and agency representatives to push for further improvements in efficiency and savings in time and money.

#### Increasing Public Safety and Combating Crime:

#### Methamphetamine:

As a founding member of the Congressional Caucus to Fight and Control Methamphetamine, Congressman Baird has diligently worked to provide Washington communities with funding to fight this menace. Baird's efforts have helped to bring in more than \$11 million to combat methamphetamine use and clean meth contaminated sites in Washington state.

#### Enhancing Education Opportunities:

#### Lower Columbia College Satellite Campus:

Making education accessible is a major priority for Congressman Baird, who helped secure a grant to establish a satellite campus of Lower Columbia College in Cathlamet. The satellite campus is enhancing educational opportunities while making classes more convenient for Wahkiakum County residents.

#### Protecting Mental Health Care:

#### Mental Health Care under Medicaid:

For the past 11 years Washington state has used federal Medicaid funds in conjunction with state funds to provide mental health care to Medicaid eligible patients as well as to patients who need service but do not qualify for Medicaid. In April 2004, the federal agency that oversees Medicaid and Medicare, CMS, required that, effective January 1, 2005, the state cease using their Medicaid funds to serve patients who do not qualify for Medicaid. This change, which came at a time the State Legislature was out of session and could not meet to solve the problem, threatened to suddenly terminate mental health care for 40,000 patients across our state.

As a former clinical psychologist who has worked in community mental clinics, Congressman Baird understands the importance of mental health

care in our communities. With the proper sustained treatment, people who would otherwise be debilitated by their illness can be functioning, contributing members of society. When he learned of the proposed rule change by CMS and the potential loss of treatment for patients in need, Congressman Baird took immediate action.

After consulting with members of the legislature and state agencies, Congressman Baird personally contacted administrators at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The Congressman drew upon his own professional background to explain the needs of the patients and the harm that could result from terminating their services. He then requested an extension be granted to give the state time to arrange alternative funding to continue the care. To their great credit, officials within CMS were willing to work closely with the Congressman and the state and in late December a six month waiver was granted, extending care through June 2005. This measure will save the state of Washington over \$20 million and, more importantly, will allow 40,000 of our citizens to continue to receive the care and treatment they need to be productive, functioning members of our communities.

Wahkiakum  
County

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum  
Council of Governments

City  
of Cathlamet

Lower  
Columbia Economic Development Council

Ports  
of Wahkiakum I and Wahkiakum II

Lewis  
and Clark Expedition

Washington  
State Government Information & Services

